THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) No, Sir.

(b) The cases of theft/loss of stamps reported by the State Treasuries to ISP are recorded in the books of ISP. As per these records, there were instances of short and excess supply of stamps of face value of Rs. 1453.75 Crores and Rs. 687.89 Crores respectively.

Nationalised banks branches in rural areas

1836. SHRI NAND KISHORE YADAV: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the total number of new branches opened by the Nationalised Banks in the rural areas during the last two years;

(b) whether it is a fact that bank branches have not been opened in several rural areas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as per their demand; and

(c) if so, by when bank branches are likely to be opened in said villages?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI S.S. PALANIMANICKAM): (a) Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reported that 19 and 34 new rural branches were opened by the nationalized banks during the years 2003-04 and 2004-05, respectively.

(b) and (c) RBI has further reported that as per its present branch licensing policy, it is left to the discretion of the banks to assess the need for opening bank branches in any area of the country after taking into consideration certain factors such as business potential, viability, infrastructure, security etc. RBI encourages Banks to open more branches in rural areas and gives priority to such requests. Accordingly, four rural branches, two each in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were opened during the year 2003-2004 and 2004-2005.

Increase in external debt

837. SHRI S. ANBALAGAN. Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India's external debt is rising continuously;

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.